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CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF LACUNAE IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH FOLK TALES

Ergasheva Moxinur
Master's Student at Uzbekistan
state world Languages university
ORCID: 0009-0002-5915-6264
Gmail: mohinure836@gmail.com
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ABSTRACT. This article examines how cultural lacunae arise when Uzbek and English folk tales are interpreted across linguistic traditions. A qualitative comparison of selected Uzbek narratives, including “Zumrad va Qimmat” and “Ur to‘qmoq,” with tales collected by Joseph Jacobs explores differences in social address, household objects, supernatural figures and narrative formulas. The analysis distinguishes unfamiliar referents from apparently familiar words carrying different cultural implications. It argues that literal equivalence is often insufficient, while unrestricted cultural substitution may erase distinctive narrative meanings. Context-sensitive retention, functional explanation and selective glossing offer more defensible translation choices. The study is interpretive; it makes no claims based on reader experiments.
Keywords: linguacultural lacunae; folk tales; cultural specificity; Uzbek folklore; English folklore; translation strategies.

КУЛЬТУРНАЯ СПЕЦИФИКА ЛАКУН В УЗБЕКСКИХ И АНГЛИЙСКИХ НАРОДНЫХ СКАЗКАХ

АННОТАЦИЯ. В статье рассматриваются культурно обусловленные лакуны, возникающие при интерпретации узбекских и английских народных сказок. На основе качественного сопоставления узбекских сказок «Зумрад и Киммат» и «Ур токмок» с текстами из собрания Джозефа Джейкобса анализируются формы обращения, предметы быта, сверхъестественные персонажи и повествовательные формулы. Разграничиваются незнакомые реалии и знакомые слова с различными культурными ассоциациями. Показано, что буквального соответствия нередко недостаточно, тогда как чрезмерная культурная замена способна устранить своеобразие текста. Предлагаются контекстуальное пояснение, сохранение культурно значимых единиц и выборочное использование глосс. Исследование носит интерпретативный характер и не опирается на эксперименты с читателями.
Ключевые слова: лингвокультурные лакуны; народные сказки; культурная специфика; узбекский фольклор; английский фольклор; стратегии перевода.

O‘ZBEK VA INGLIZ XALQ ERTAKLARIDAGI LAKUNALARNING MADANIY O‘ZIGA XOSLIGI

ANNOTATSIYA. Maqolada o‘zbek va ingliz xalq ertaklarini boshqa til va madaniyat doirasida talqin qilishda yuzaga keladigan lingvomadaniy lakunalar o‘rganiladi. “Zumrad va Qimmat”, “Ur to‘qmoq” hamda Jozef Jeykobs to‘plagan ingliz ertaklari qiyosiy tahlil qilinib, murojaat shakllari, maishiy buyumlar, g‘ayritabiiy qahramonlar va hikoya boshlanishiga xos qoliplar ko‘rib chiqiladi. Notanish tushunchalar bilan tanish so‘zlarning turlicha madaniy

ma'nolari farqlanadi. So'zma-so'z muqobillik har doim yetarli emasligi, ortiqcha moslashtirish esa milliy xususiyatlarni yo'qotishi mumkinligi asoslanadi. Madaniy birlikni saqlash, qisqa izoh berish va vaziyatga mos tarjima qilish usullari taklif etiladi. Tadqiqot o'quvchilar ishtirokidagi tajribaga emas, matn talqiniga asoslangan.

Kalit so'zlar: lingvomadaniy lakunalar; xalq ertaklari; madaniy o'ziga xoslik; o'zbek folklori; ingliz folklori; tarjima strategiyalari.

INTRODUCTION

Folk tales travel easily across borders because their plots appear immediately recognizable: a poor person receives help, an arrogant character loses a reward, or a dangerous opponent is defeated. Yet narrative familiarity can conceal cultural distance. The same scene may contain a form of greeting, a domestic object or an expectation of respect that has no equally compact counterpart in another language. These points of incomplete correspondence are treated here as linguacultural lacunae. They need not be missing dictionary entries; sometimes the translated word is familiar but invites the wrong inference.

Uzbek and English folk tales provide a useful comparison because both traditions recount tests of character and encounters with enchanted beings, while differing in the social details through which those episodes are narrated. The central research question is how the translation of culturally marked details affects a reader's understanding of social relations, narrative function and moral evaluation. Rather than compiling supposed national characteristics, the article examines particular textual choices and the consequences of plausible English or Uzbek renderings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Translation research has moved beyond the assumption that a word in one language always has a stable counterpart in another. Baker explains how culture-specific concepts create non-equivalence at word level and why explanatory solutions may be necessary (1). Aixelá treats culture-specific items relationally: a reference becomes a translation problem because of the difference between the source context and the receiving audience, not simply because it is exotic (2). The term lacuna is used here in this limited, operational sense, without claiming that either language lacks the underlying idea.

Folklore studies complicates straightforward substitution. Propp's account of recurrent narrative functions shows why figures from different traditions may fill similar plot positions without becoming identical characters (3). Uther's classification of international tale types likewise facilitates comparison but does not remove local variation (4). Jacobs's collection preserves recognizable English narrative patterns and dialect-marked speech while also reflecting an editor's choices about written presentation (5). Zipes reminds researchers that printed fairy tales are historically mediated versions, not transparent recordings of a single collective voice (6).

Venuti's discussion of domestication and foreignization makes the cultural stakes of fluent translation explicit (7). Dickins, examining culture-specific items, shows that translation procedures involve several intersecting choices rather than one universal rule (8). These perspectives suggest an approach that considers both the tale's narrative economy and the target reader's access to cultural knowledge.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study applies close reading and contrastive textual analysis to a deliberately small, illustrative corpus. Uzbek examples come from published versions of "Zumrad va Qimmat" and "Ur to'qmoq"; English examples are drawn from Jacobs's English Fairy Tales, particularly "Jack

and the Beanstalk" and "Tom Tit Tot" (5), (9), (10). The online Uzbek versions are treated as identifiable textual witnesses, not as authoritative evidence for every oral variant. No interviews, surveys, frequency counts or claims of representative sampling were undertaken.

Each selected passage was examined at three levels: what the expression or object denotes, what it does within the story, and what an unfamiliar reader might reasonably infer from a literal rendering. The proposed translation solutions are analytical suggestions, not recorded decisions by published translators. Four working categories are used: referential lacunae (objects and culturally specific entities), pragmatic lacunae (relations and rules of address), associative lacunae (different implications of recognizable terms), and formal lacunae (rhythm, repetition and storytelling formulas). These overlap in practice; their purpose is to clarify the translator's decision.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Cultural lacunae in selected Uzbek and English folk-tale passages

Textual example	Cultural lacuna	Suggested translation response
"Zumrad va Qimmat": buvijon; sandiq	Respectful address; chest as moral test	Translate respect; preserve chest imagery
"Ur to'qmoq": ochil, dasturxon	Food spread and magic command	Retain dasturxon; gloss once
"Ur to'qmoq": assalomu alaykum	Polite entry and ritual greeting	Retain greeting or explain its function
"Jack and the Beanstalk": giant	Not equivalent in every respect to dev	Preserve giant's distinctive portrayal
"Tom Tit Tot": name; dialect	Secret-name power; oral speech texture	Retain name; reproduce rhythmic voice

The most striking differences concern ordinary behavior rather than spectacular magic. In "Zumrad va Qimmat," Zumrad's respectful dealings with an older woman form part of the test that differentiates her from Qimmat (9). Translating buvijon merely as "old woman" identifies an age category but loses the affectionate and respectful force of the address. "Grandmother" conveys deference but may suggest literal kinship; "dear grandmother" can work in dialogue if the context makes its conventional use clear. Here the lacuna is pragmatic: readers must recognize that the way a character speaks contributes to the tale's moral assessment.

The sandiq in the same tale is equally revealing. English "chest" is an adequate basic equivalent, so the difficulty is not the absence of a word. The contrasting selection of a modest and an imposing chest links visible material choice to the distribution of reward and punishment. A paraphrase such as "box of treasure" would announce the outcome too soon and weaken the tale's moral symmetry. The best translation preserves the concrete object and allows the narrative to teach its significance; a glossary is unnecessary unless the edition aims to document traditional household material culture.

"Ur to'qmoq" places a familiar domestic item into a magical sequence. A dasturxon is a cloth spread for food, but "tablecloth" in English can suggest only a covering for a raised table. The command ochil, dasturxon makes the spread itself the source of a meal (10). Translating the phrase as "Magic table, bring food" communicates the result while replacing the source object

with a different domestic arrangement. Retaining dasturxon once, accompanied by a discreet gloss, preserves the scene's cultural setting. Repetition of the command thereafter can remain concise and rhythmic.

The same tale also includes the greeting assalomu alaykum when the elderly protagonist enters another character's home (10). Its social work matters because entry into a household precedes requests, gifts and conflict. Omitting it makes the exchange faster but removes a cue of expected courtesy. In a children's retelling, "Peace be upon you" may retain its distinctive meaning, while "he greeted him respectfully" prioritizes flow. Neither should be taken as universally correct; the intended genre and level of cultural introduction govern the choice.

The English material reveals the problem in reverse. The giant in Jacobs's "Jack and the Beanstalk" can occupy an adversarial position similar to a supernatural enemy in Uzbek tales, but rendering every giant as dev would suggest a specific local creature and might distort its physical presentation (5). Propp's idea of narrative function can explain a structural resemblance, yet cannot authorize cultural identity (3). An unmarked Uzbek rendering describing the giant's enormous size may therefore be preferable to substituting a familiar demon figure.

In "Tom Tit Tot," the plot depends on a supernatural helper's secret name and an increasingly threatening wager (5). The name's syllables and the tale's dialectal voice contribute to oral texture. A literal explanation of the name would not replace its sound, while assigning a regional Uzbek accent would introduce social meanings not present in the English text. Retaining the name and selectively reproducing repetition permits the stakes to remain intelligible without creating a false dialectal equivalent. Such passages show that formal lacunae can matter even when plot events are fully understood.

Three observations follow. First, a lacuna is an interpretive relationship: English "chest" is lexically ordinary but may lose symbolic detail if overexplained, while Uzbek dasturxon requires contextual support despite being ordinary within its source setting. Second, differences are specific to versions and audiences, not immutable ethnic traits. Third, the best solution may vary within one tale: preserve a culturally named object, translate a greeting by function and retain the sound of a magical name. This contextual combination is more precise than imposing a single domestication or foreignization policy on the entire text (2), (7), (8).

CONCLUSION

The comparison indicates that cultural specificity in Uzbek and English folk tales resides in small narrative decisions as much as in exotic characters. Respectful address, the presentation of a food spread, the interpretation of a chest and the naming of an antagonist guide readers toward particular moral and social expectations. These meanings cannot reliably be reconstructed from word-for-word equivalents alone. Translation is strongest when it identifies what a detail contributes to the story before deciding whether to retain, gloss, paraphrase or replace it.

The study is limited by its small set of published textual witnesses and by the absence of reception evidence. It therefore offers a transparent analytical framework, not a measured ranking of translation strategies. Future work could compare multiple oral and printed versions of the same tales and test how readers interpret alternative translations. Preserving culturally meaningful differences while explaining only what readers need is the central practical principle supported by the cases examined.

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